

**Jeopardy Assessment**  
for the Proposed Incidental Taking Authorization  
of the Wood Turtle

Arrowhead-Weston Transmission Line Rebuild Project- Spread LW  
Marathon County, Wisconsin

**Background**

The State threatened Wood turtle is found throughout northern and west-central Wisconsin. The species is documented from 45 counties in the state with just over 250 known occurrences. The statewide range has changed little over time but populations appear to be depressed from historic levels. Wood Turtles are active between mid-March and mid-October and tend to forage in lowland hardwoods and upland deciduous mesic to wet-mesic forests and open wet meadows and riparian grassy areas during the summer. Breeding typically occurs within or in close proximity to the water in spring and fall but can occur in any month. This species is often a communal nester and will typically lay eggs during June. Nesting areas tend to be within 200 feet of the stream, the majority of them being within 100 feet. Incubation is approximately 55-70 days, therefore, eggs hatch between August and mid-September.

**Jeopardy Assessment**

The proposed Arrowhead-Weston Transmission Line Rebuild Project has a low potential for take of individual turtles because of temporary disturbance to habitat suitable for wood turtles at five separate locations within the 31-mile long LW spread. In one instance, a small communal turtle nesting site will be impacted but direct impacts to turtles or nests will not occur due to the timing of the project. The remaining 4 sites have not evidence of nesting. Other Department permits required installation conditions that will minimize impacts to wetland habitats and require restoration to insure that post-construction vegetation conditions are equal to or exceed pre-construction conditions along the powerline corridor. In addition, the soil disturbance associated with the construction activities is likely to open up additional habitat that is suitable for nesting and may result in a net improvement to the nesting potential at this location.

Incidental take of the wood turtle, which is expected to be extremely low – if it occurs at all, is unlikely to impact the status or recovery potential of the affected local populations. In addition, it is not expected to impact the statewide recovery potential of this species because this species is still widely distributed across its historic range. Therefore, the Department has determined that the proposed project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the state population of these turtles or the whole plant-animal community of which they are a part.

**Conservation Measures**

At the majority of locations where the potential for incidental take of wood turtles has been identified, take of the state-threatened turtle was avoided by delaying installation until after the turtle's active period. For the 5 locations where avoidance of the Wood Turtle was not possible, the following conditions apply:

1. Vegetation clearing and construction activities will be limited to an area less than the standard 140 ft. x 120-ft. area around each proposed structure if individual site conditions allow, and to a 40-ft. width through the center of the remaining ROW.
2. Isolation fencing will be installed to a distance of 200 feet from a perennial stream,

- (a) A qualified herpetologist will be on site during fence installation.
  - (b) Turtle fencing will be installed to a height no less than 16 inches and to a depth no less than 6 inches below the ground surface.
  - (c) The ends of the fence will be turned back according to the attached fence layouts (see isolation fence Sample A).
  - (d) The fencing will be inspected twice weekly on non-consecutive days through October 15 to ensure the integrity of the fence. Repairs will be made within 24 hours of discovery. Maintenance of fencing must be resumed on April 1 if construction activities extend beyond that date.
  - (e) Fencing removal must occur within 14 days of final grading and seeding.
3. A qualified herpetologist will conduct a turtle removal within each fenced area after all fencing is installed. Survey effort will involve a careful inspection of the entire fenced in area to maximize the opportunity to move turtles out of harms way. All turtles found within a fenced area must be identified to species, photographed and released immediately outside of the fenced area. All sighting and removals must be reported to the Department in a report that summarizes survey efforts (time actually spent on turtle surveys). The herpetologist does not need to be on site for any work thereafter.
  4. Any turtles found within the construction area after the turtle removal will be moved immediately outside the construction zone by or under the direction of the project's environmental manager. All wood turtles encountered are to be reported to the Department, with precise locality data, within 48 hours.
  5. Low impact vegetation clearing methods, such as hand clearing or a track-mounted hot saw (to avoid need for skidding logs), will be used as appropriate within suitable turtle habitat.
  6. Alternative construction access routes will be used when available.
  7. Sandy subsoil spoil material that is generated at location LW147 should be placed in a manner that creates turtle nesting habitat. Disturbance caused by the previous powerline installation appears to have resulted in the turtle nesting that currently exists at this location.
  8. Sites will be restored to pre-construction conditions upon conclusion of construction activities, except for the sand conditions mentioned in #7 above for site LW147.